

Opinion

'Civilisation is a movement and not a condition, a voyage and not a harbour'

— Arnold Toynbee, English historian (1889 — 1975)



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Chairman of the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme in Bermuda Kenneth Bartram (far left), former DoE director Tina Nash (fifth from left) and Bermuda Commissioner of Corrections Lt Col Edward Lamb (right) meet with representatives of the South African equivalent of the Award, the President's Award, and the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa, including CEO of the Award in South Africa Martin

Inspiring young offenders across the globe

By Stacey Smith

In light of the challenges that Bermuda has been facing with youth violence, it is important to explore any and every option to help restore the values and sense of community that the island is known for. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Programme has the potential to restore a sense of hope in our young and incarcerated. The Award — a character development programme for youth between the ages of 14 and 25 — has led to a significant reduction in the rates of recidivism not only in the UK, but also in other countries including South Africa, Kenya and Australia. It was first introduced to young offenders in the UK in the 1980s and now operates in prisons in 21 countries around the world.

In the Republic of South Africa, The President's Award for Youth Empowerment has experienced almost two decades of success since The Award was implemented within the Ministry of Corrections rehabilitative programs. After spending 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela — the patron and chief of the programme — recognised that The Award is a really valuable tool for rehabilitating young people in South African correctional facilities.

In 2011, it was recorded that 60 of their corrections facilities incorporated the programme and 1/3 of all South African Award participants were within the corrections programme. As a result of this remarkable success, in 2011 the Chairman for The Award in Bermuda, Kenneth Bartram, former National Director Tina Nash and Commissioner of Corrections Lt Col Edward Lamb, travelled to South Africa where they gained valuable insight into the operation of the programme. The aim of the trip was to provide a practical and experimental model for the staff of the Corrections facilities to further develop The Award as part of the rehabilitative programme on the island.

Whilst in South Africa Mr Bartram, Mrs Nash and Lt Col Lamb met with various individuals including National Director for The President's Award in South Africa Martin Scholtz, the Minister of Correctional Services, senior officers, region officials, Award officials and leaders as well as inmates (both current and past). They were also joined by Award representatives from Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya and Uganda and, as a group, they shared their ideas, knowledge and experiences. Mr Scholtz said the young people involved with the programme reflect very positively about their experiences. He pointed out that the inmates have the opportunity to develop skills like pottery making, woodwork or bee keeping which often provides them with a means of earning revenue once they're released back into the community. However, such opportunities, as well as those for sporting, depend on the amount of resources available to each correctional facility.

Mr Scholtz explained that the inmates have an opportunity to leave the prison grounds if they want to (with security), for the expedition and community service components. "The Award leaders become like parent figures to these youngsters, and they trust them 120 percent because they've travelled a journey with them and they've developed a relationship of trust."

He explained that, when doing the service component, inmates feel that it has given them an opportunity to give back to the communities that they have possibly harmed or hurt in the process of their particular crime.

Mr Scholtz shared a story about a young man who was significantly transformed by the programme. He was due to be released from prison after receiving his Bronze and Silver Awards and actually chose to remain in prison so that he could complete the programme and obtain the Gold Award with the group of young people that he had participated with when he began. He obtained his Gold Award, was

released from prison and after forming a great impression as a volunteer at a local library in Johannesburg, he was eventually offered full time employment. "I think the real part of the value for youngsters in correctional facilities is the sense of purpose and identity," said Mr Scholtz. "They've made a commitment to develop themselves as individuals and, having made that choice, they want to be in a group of positive young people."

In some correctional facilities participants request to be separated from those who choose to remain negative and unproductive, he added. Reflecting on the problem of youth violence in Bermuda, Lt Col Lamb said we're now reaping what we've sown for decades. "I spoke about how Bermuda was changing back then and that we were evolving into a society that was going to pay the price for our materialism, and in our pursuit of materialism, the neglect of our families," Lt Col Lamb said. "So today we're just seeing the results of neglect. We've neglected to put our families first and we've neglected to hold onto our moral values over the years."

Lt Col Lamb offered what he believes is the solution to the problem: "Everybody has to have an awakening in this country. We have to elevate our consciousness and everybody has to be able to contribute to the training of our children, such that we can no longer operate in a realm where I only concern myself with my child."

"We all have to be about being our brother's keeper, which also means being the keeper of my brother's children. So if I see a child who doesn't have a father, then somebody has to try to be a father to that person, and be a role model to that person. Everyone has to take an honest assessment and say, 'you know what, I have a child, what am I doing for that child?' Or 'I don't have a child, but I have a niece or a nephew, what am I doing for that niece or nephew or somebody else's child? How can I help a child along the way? And all of that will contribute to more secure children, children with better self-esteem and children with more hope. So the answer is investing ourselves into our children from a young age."

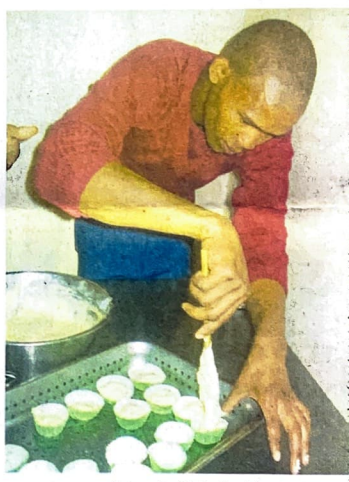
When the adults of this country take five minutes out of their daily lives to show some interest and concern in the life of another child, when they give up their time, money and intellect to guide somebody along the way "watch how that spark lights a massive inferno" added Lt Col Lamb. "That's what we're going to start to see a decline in these young men engaging in all this crazy behaviour, because right now they don't see beyond tomorrow. We have enough resources here and enough people of talent who can really nip this thing in the bud once and for all."

Lt Col Lamb said one of the biggest challenges is trying to reframe and reshape a person's thinking, whether it be from life on a street corner, living in a gang or a drug addiction. However, he said he believes everyone has the potential to change. "I've seen it with my own eyes, and I'm a man of God so I believe that Jesus Christ can save anybody in an instant."

Speaking of the visit to South Africa, Lt Col Lamb said he was very impressed with what he saw. "What was very real to me was the trans-



Participants in The President's Award in South Africa are shown putting out a fire as part of their Award.



A South African participant in that country's equivalent of the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, The President's Award, prepares baked goods.

formation that had taken place in the lives of inmates in South Africa, many of whom gave their testimonies. One guy who was convicted of murder showed all his bullet wounds in his body. He had survived being shot nine times in one incident. He told about his life that led him to being incarcerated, and even while he was incarcerated he still continued his gang activities until he started The Award programme. The Award has completely changed his life."

There were also female inmates and staff members who told stories of how they've been changed, he said. "South Africa is still an evolving country with high rates of crime and very high numbers of inmates in their facilities. The inmates came to jail having committed some serious crimes, but those who participated in the Award programme were reporting real change in their lives. And so that really confirmed to me that if these guys could be transformed then it certainly can be done in Bermuda."

The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme had operated at the Island's Co-Ed Facility where young offenders are held.

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"In South Africa even the volunteers' mindsets changed. They realised that they can transform someone from being negative to positive and in the process they grow as well," said Lt Col Lamb. "The programme is unquestionably successful and the merits are immeasurable, but it requires people to make it work."

If you're interested in volunteering please contact the Award National Director at director@theaward.bm or 547-4868.

Write to us

Letters sent in any form must be accompanied by the full name, address and the daytime telephone number of the sender. Letters without these details will not be accepted. These details will be omitted on request. Letters should be no longer than 250 words. The Royal Gazette reserves the right to edit letters that exceed this limit.

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Photo courtesy The President's Award — South Africa

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